

Building an Inclusive Environment, One Job at a Time

We make it **possible**

In late 2021, Hutchinson's Ithaca, Michigan, plant formed a partnership with an organization called Mid-Michigan Industries (MMI) to implement an inclusive training program within the facility. Through the initiative, individuals with varying abilities can train and work at the plant, helping to fill necessary roles and create an environment of inclusivity. The result has been more successful than anyone could have expected, solidifying Hutchinson's reputation as an inclusive employer and strengthening our desire to expand the program beyond the original location.

About Mid-Michigan Industries

Serving eight counties throughout central Michigan, MMI is dedicated to developing inclusive communities and meaningful connections through employment and training. For 50 years, MMI has helped thousands of people achieve greater independence, improve their work skills and enjoy a higher quality of life.

The MMI process is not one-size-fits-all. Each individualized program meets the person served at their current level and helps them take the next steps toward an improved quality of life. This is accomplished by holding an annual meeting with each person alongside their guardians or case workers to determine that person's interests, needs and benchmarks. Every few months, the goals are reexamined as each person served makes progress.

Employment specialists then work one-on-one with the individual to find them suitable community employment, whether in manufacturing or another industry they express interest in. Individuals receive help finding and applying for jobs, as well as interview training and job coaching. Employment partners like Hutchinson are a critical part of the process, providing the individuals with not just a paycheck, but a sense of fulfillment and purpose.



The Beginning of a Successful Partnership

Hutchinson and MMI expressed mutual interest in working together in 2021, leading to a program that includes six employees across two different shifts. Darrell Cojocar, MMI's onsite job coach, was immediately impressed with Hutchinson's integration of these individuals.

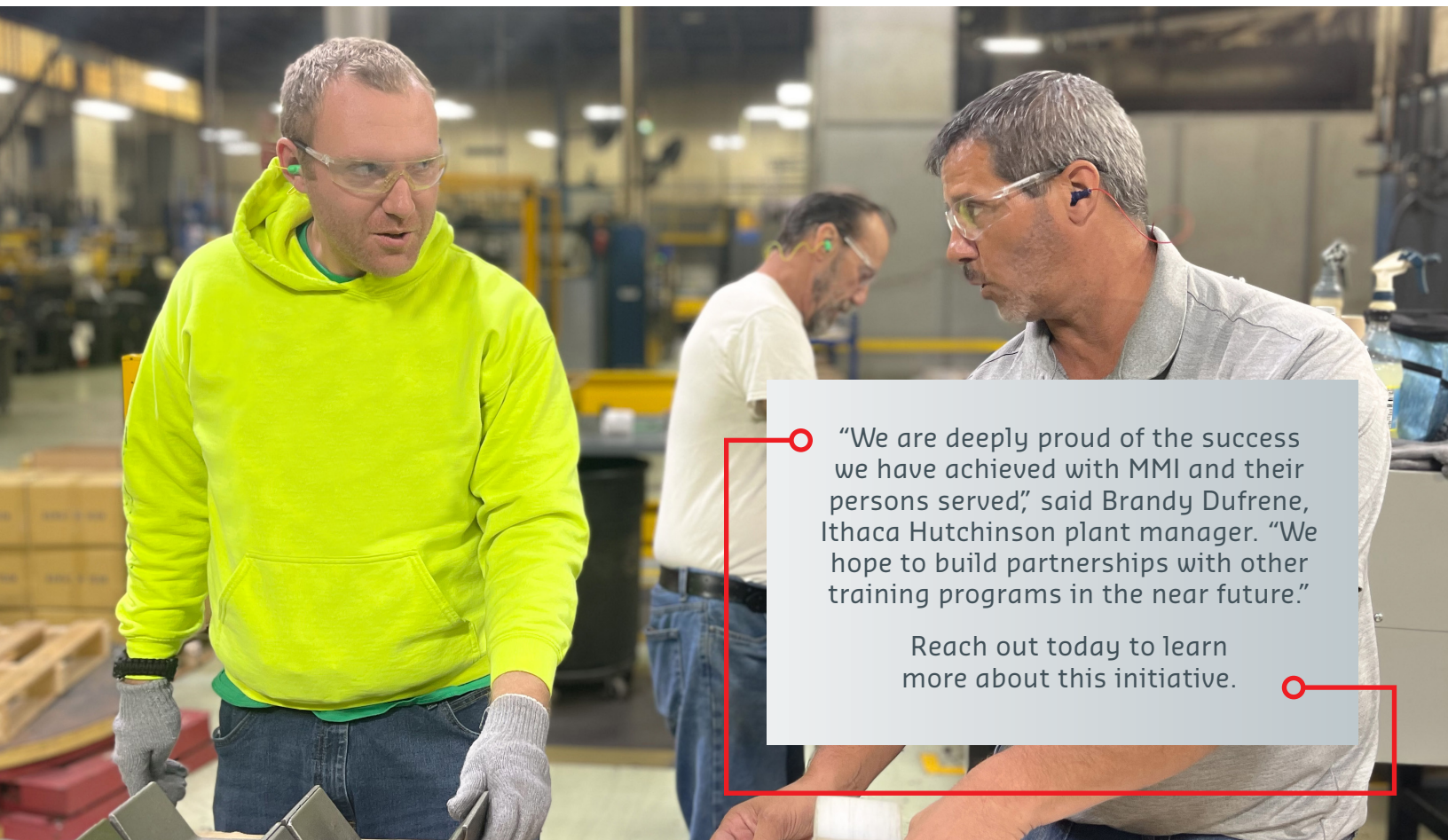
"They are truly an inclusive factory, it's not lip service," said Cojocar. "The workers at the factory treat each other and our persons served as family. Our team is 100% incorporated into the facility processes; they are performing the same tasks as other Hutchinson employees like cleaning and inspecting parts, applying barcode labels, running presses and handling overload from other operators."

Cojocar emphasized that Hutchinson is not operating as a charity case—the MMI workers are learning valuable skills while contributing to the company's bottom line.

"This is about more than a paycheck for the people we serve," said Cojocar. "To be an important part of creating something, each and every day, is invaluable. This program breaks down the stigma that workers with differing abilities can't be safe in a manufacturing plant—or any other setting for that matter."

Looking to the Future

The success we have had with this program can't be overstated. In fact, one of the individuals has had his hours increased to take on a bigger role within our company. We have seen how this program not only benefits the trainees from MMI, but also our fulltime employees as they work alongside them. Becoming an inclusive workplace has not only helped alleviate the labor shortage plaguing most industries, but allowed us to provide opportunities to hard-working, smart and loyal individuals who deserve the chance to have fulfilling and rewarding careers.



"We are deeply proud of the success we have achieved with MMI and their persons served," said Brandy Dufrene, Ithaca Hutchinson plant manager. "We hope to build partnerships with other training programs in the near future."

Reach out today to learn more about this initiative.